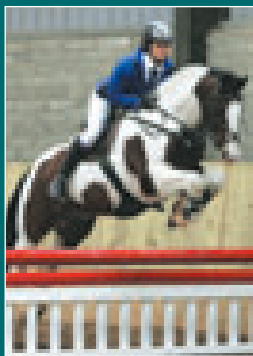


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Beef farmers are facing closure over dire returns

LISBURN: HILLSBOROUGH PLOUGHING SOCIETY MATCH



■ **ON COURSE:** David Leckie turning in for another run up his plot at Hillsborough Ploughing Society's match at Lisburn. (FW48-226SR)

■ **MORE PICTURES** - page 49

PICTURE: Sam Rea

By Chris McCullough

EVEN with this week's small increase in prices, beef producers fear they cannot continue to farm at a loss for much longer.

For those that hang on in there, the future is not guaranteed, as the gap between cost of production and actual prices received per kilo keeps on increasing, in the wrong direction.

Price disparities between Northern Ireland and Great Britain remain controversial this week, and, according to John Carson, chairman of the Northern Ireland council of the National Beef Association, the price simply has to rise in order for farmers to remain in business.

"Beef prices have strengthened a little this week but nowhere near

what it needs to," said John. "I feel the low prices are a result of two way action between processors and retailers, one holding the other to ransom, and both fearful of upsetting each other.

"However, the fact is, since May 2007 the following 12-month period saw fertiliser prices escalate by 128 per cent; feed prices by 48 per cent; and fuel and running costs by 75 per cent.

"These hikes equate to a 60p/kg rise in the cost of producing beef compared to the previous year for the more astute farmers, but realistically 78p/kg on average for all beef farmers.

"When you compare actual beef return prices year on year we are now receiving just over 250p/kg against 205p/kg last year, so it doesn't take a genius to work out costs

■ Turn to page 4

Strong euro helps farmers - UFU

THE Ulster Farmers' Union says a significant increase in the value of the euro against Sterling should be boosting farm gate prices.

In the past week the value of the euro has risen to 85 UK pence. The UFU says this will make locally produced food products much more competitive against food imports.

UFU chief executive Clarke Black said: "Farmers in Northern Ireland are supplying their produce into a very competitive global food market. Our main outlet is the UK retail marketplace and this swing in currency will make our products more competitive versus food imports, which will now be more expensive because the euro is strengthening."

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